

Free Methodist Church
Pleasantville, Pennsylvania

HABS No. Pa.-531

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Reduced Copies of Measured Drawings

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No. 5-Pennsylvania

Historic American Buildings Survey
J. Howard Hicks, District Officer
134 East 10th Street, Erie, Pennsylvania

FREE METHODIST CHURCH
Pleasantville, Venango County, Pennsylvania

Owner

The Free Methodist Church.

Date of Erection

Between August 21st, 1847 and January 6th, 1849 when the church was dedicated.

Architect

Manley Colton Beebe.

Builder

Unknown, possibly Jarrod or Flavius Benedict or---Moore.

Present Condition

Good.

Number of Stories

One and basement.

Materials of Construction

Cut sandstone, white pine, tin, wooden shingles.

Other Existing Records

Information and personal recollections furnished by Architect M. C. Beebe of Pleasantville. Personal interviews, drawings, photographs.

Additional Data

Bibliography-History of Venango County by J. H. Newton, published by J. A. Caldwell, Columbus, Ohio in 1879.

History of Venango County, published by Brown, Runk and Co., Chicago, Illinois, 1890.

An illustrated History of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, by William H. Egle, M.D., published by DeWitt C. Goodrich and Co., Harrisburg, Pa., 1876. County of Venango.

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Pleasantville was especially fortunate in having in its earlier years, Aaron Benedict, a very capable and progressive man, from whom it received its name and derived its early prosperity. Aaron Benedict was born at West Stockbridge, Massachusetts, February 17th, 1779, of English parentage. During the war of 1812 he was the proprietor of flouring mills between the villages of Cortland and Homer, in Cortland County, New York, and became quite wealthy. At the close of the war he engaged in merchantile pursuits at Fabius, Onondaga County, New York, where he was a leading man in business and society. He built a Baptist church and was otherwise prominent in various enterprises designed to promote the public welfare.

When the Susquehanna and Waterford Turnpike was constructed in 1818-19 he was the contractor for a considerable part of the work. While his individual venture was successful, he sustained heavy losses through the failure of others with whom he was associated, and was obliged to sacrifice his property to satisfy obligations thus incurred. He had formed the acquaintance of Harm Jan Huidekoper of Meadville, agent for the Holland Land Company, and gained a knowledge of Venango County during the progress of his contract. To a man of his enterprise and capabilities it offered the opportunity to retrieve his fortunes. As the agent of the Holland Land Company he also had the chance to purchase a tract of 400 acres of land, which he did in 1820, and brought his family to Pleasantville in 1821. He immediately organized a Baptist church, also a school. The school house was in use as late as 1890 but in a remodeled condition.

This first school house was built in 1823 and was for many years the place of worship of the Baptist society, located in the eastern end of Pleasantville-"over a mile away from the present church. In 1844 it was moved to within half a mile of the present edifice, so that the original quarters provided for the minister was some distance away from the new church." (M.C. Beebe.)

The Holland Land Company through the influence of Mr. Benedict also gave two acres of ground for a cemetery for Pleasantville. Although interments are no longer permitted, the inclosure is preserved from desecration. The first burial was that of Albert, son of Aaron and Louisa Benedict, who died February 7th, 1824, aged 15 years, 10 months and 7 days.

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Aaron Benedict was a zealous adherent of the Allegheny Baptist Church and he started the organization of a society at the village of Pleasantville. John Tennent and wife, Mrs. David Copeland, Aaron Benedict and wife, and Mrs. Ira B. West were the first members of the Allegheny Baptist Church. Revorend Blake was the first minister, and Rev. E. M. Miles was among his early successors. Rev. Samuel Miles served in this capacity from 1838 to 1842. Rev. John Hicks from December 1842 to July 1848; Rev. George Spratt from July 1849 to August 1853, Rev. Wilcox from April 1854 to February 1856; Rev. W. B. Bingham from April 1857 to April 1860; Rev. Joel Green from May 1860 to April 1862, Reverends Haskell, Willoughby, Davis, Hurlburt, Brasted, Trowbridge and Pierce succeeded in the order of their names, but none of them remained except for a very brief period. Rev. Pierce retired November 7th, 1875, and while an organization was kept up until 1890 or later, there was no regular pastor. Subsequently the Free Methodist congregation obtained possession of the building.

The Free Methodist Church of Pleasantville, Venango County, Pennsylvania is a frame building of one story in an excellent state of preservation. Its chaste lines follow the classical revival period of building closely and the pleasing tower adds a correct note of harmony. It was erected between August 21st, 1847, when Aaron Benedict gave a deed for the site of the new building and January 6th, 1849, when it was dedicated. On the same date he gave a deed for the site of a parsonage, back and to the east of the church. The organization known as the Allegheny Baptist Church built the church building now occupied and known as the Free Methodist Church. The front of this church faces south with an exceptionally well balanced design. The wide central entrance is reached by a flight of four steps of cut stone. On each side of this entrance is a flat pilaster 12' 6" in height 1' 10" in width with a plain moulding cap 8 3/8" high. Each corner of the church is ornamented by plain pilasters to match those of the entrance. They are 14' 6" in height. The opening of the entrance is 12' 6" wide and 10' 3" high, and has eight equal size panels about 8" wide.

The exterior of the church is covered with white pine lap siding 4" to the weather. The foundation is of cut sandstone. The windows of the front of the church are located one on each side of the entrance, centered between the pilasters of the entrance and the corner of the church. They are of two sash each, having four lights of glass each, 18" x 24". There are ten windows in the building altogether, four on each side and two mentioned in front. There are no windows in the rear. All of the windows are of the same size.

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The entrance is surmounted by a plain moulding and the entire front of the church is surmounted by a plain wooden frieze above the entrance, and the corner pilasters. The cornice has a crown moulding, with a return emphasizing the gable. On each side of the double doors, in the recess is a vertical panel, being of about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the height of the doors. To the east and west sides of the recess in the doorway is placed a small door. Each of these small doors are 3' 3" wide by 7' 6" high. The roof of the church is covered with wooden shingles.

The belfry is placed near the front of the roof and rises about 22' above it. It has a wooden base which is 3' high, surmounted by plain mouldings which in turn are surmounted by the body of the belfry. Each corner of the body of the belfry is ornamented by a plain pilaster, which has a plain moulding to resemble a cap. The pilasters enclose the louvres. This part of the belfry is in turn surmounted by plain mouldings, and this is surmounted by a tin octagon roof with a ball and plain weather-vane, and to crown all a lightening-rod or arrester is placed on top of the weather-vane.

The pulpit platform in the body of the church is 8' wide by 12' long with one step on each side. Two columns 8- $\frac{3}{4}$ in diameter are set 12' 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ " apart and 11' 4" from the front part of the room with two half columns in line placed against the sides of the building, evidently used as roof supports. The inside length of the church is 49' and the width is 34'-0". The barrel ceiling is 11' 10" on the sides in height and 16'-6" in the center.

In the year 1831 E. R. Beebe came to Pleasantville. He was a nephew of Aaron Benedict, and established a tannery on State Street, Pleasantville. He was alive in 189-, and his great-grandson is Mr. M. C. Beebe who contributed information in regard to Aaron Benedict. There are no especial historical events connected with this church, but as an example of the revival of classical buildings in this section of Pennsylvania it stands well.

Anna Scott Taylor

Approved

Howard Hinkle
District Officer

January 14 - 1937.